

Vassanji's Toronto and Durrell's Alexandria: The View from Across or the View from Beside?

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The British and Canadian authors Lawrence Durrell and M. G. Vassanji do not, at first thought, call out for a comparative study under the rubric of Indian diasporic literature. Neither are typically regarded in criticism through their origins or ethnicity. The focus instead goes to their characters and subject matter, their cosmopolitan experiences. Confusions surrounding both authors have limited biographical studies, in Durrell's case typically excluding him from diasporic literature. Moreover, their distinct prose styles limit their immediate affinities—Durrell is known for lush writing and playfulness with textuality while Vassanji's terse and conversational diction is more likely to remind a reader of Hemingway. Nevertheless, Vassanji provokes readers to make comparisons on precisely these terms, though he has acknowledged the unexpected nature of his suggestion—in 2002 he delivered a public lecture on Lawrence Durrell in Ottawa, "The Boy in the Street: The View from Across." It begins with his statement:

I can't imagine that the organizers who first contacted me to speak at this conference realized that I had a much thumbed set of Lawrence Durrell's Alexandria Quartet on my shelves. Amazing coincidence... It turns out to be a coincidence brought about by the fact of imperial rule that Durrell's [sic] life and mine intersect. (Vassanji, "The Boy" 1)

The text of Vassanji's lecture is now held in the Lawrence Durrell Collection at the University of Victoria's McPherson Library. While authors, or at least effective authors, tend to be slippery, deceptive, and cunning as any con artist, I will naïvely take Vassanji at his word. He positions himself and Durrell through his extensive allusions to Durrell's works as well as their status within empire. For Vassanji, this consists of his own exoticization and eroticization of the European other, whom he sees from "across the street," concomitant with Durrell's exoticization of the colonized other, "the Arabs. The fixture, the scenery" (Vassanji, "The Boy" 5). They are tied through the "fact of imperial rule," which neither could escape and that distorts their perspectives. Vassanji's conjecture is the crux of my argument; however, by accounting for Durrell's ironic view of imperial privilege and both authors' use of allusion,

Durrell and Vassanji become far more akin, suggesting the availability of new readings for both authors via Indian diasporic literature.

Background

Vassanji's ties to India via colonial Kenya and Tanzania are made prominent in his works, or at least on their dust jackets, and by proxy through his characters whose backgrounds echo his own. In contrast, Durrell's origins outside Britain and the Mediterranean are more likely to be overlooked or even misrepresented rather than emphasized. Vassanji developed his first novels and stories from his doubly displaced experiences and his diasporic position—the reader encounters this displacement visually and verbally on the books before even opening them, which prepares the reader to engage from a specific perspective. Amin Malak has discussed this element of Vassanji's works perhaps more thoroughly than any other critic. In his reading, "What distinguishes M.G. Vassanji's work from that of other Canadian writers is its vibrant, affectionate depiction of the double migration of his South Asian characters" ("Ambivalent" 277). Moreover, for Malak,

post-coloniality... is often compounded by the exigencies of exile, migration, and double migration; in such an environment the writer's sensibility is naturally challenged by a multiplicity of affiliations.... [P]ostcoloniality is, in essence, a destabilizing situation of 'in-betweenness' which confronts the writer with the polemics of ethnicity, history, politics, and immigration/exile, on the one hand, and textuality and narrative strategy on the other. Anyone who studies [such] works... would notice a striking preoccupation with the shifting boundaries of 'in-betweenness,' articulating in the process a complex phenomenon that I wish to call 'ambivalent affiliations.' (277)

Apart from Vassanji's extensive allusions to Durrell, often to Durrell's doubly displaced exiles in competing empires and social groups, Malak's comments remarkably describe the figure whom Vassanji mistakenly locates in "the metropolis of the empire, its centre" (1). I do not intend to subvert Malak's apt comments, but in comparing these two authors, I must also note Durrell's censored colonial history, which originates in a railway terminus.

Born in Jullunder of parents born in India, Durrell's childhood was built in a nation where he was never welcomed—thus began his "ambivalent affiliations." He was sent "home" to England for his education, creating a rift between his imagined Father England and Mother India, as I have outlined with regard to his autobiographical, suppressed first novel, *Pied Piper of Lovers* (Gifford, "Homeless" n.pag; "Introduction" vi-xvii). Durrell was born in 1912 and raised in India, sent to England in 1923 by a family that had never seen

this “home,” and then settled in Greece in 1935 until he was evacuated to Egypt via Crete in World War II (Durrell, “Airgraph” 213). After time in Egypt, Greece, Argentina, Yugoslavia, and Cyprus, he finally settled in Southern France for the last thirty years of his life.¹ Moreover, Durrell was “refused British citizenship” in 1966 in an attempt to “reduc[e] immigration to Britain from India, Pakistan and the West Indies” (Ezard n.p.). More specifically, Durrell was denied free right of access to Britain under new laws and had to apply for a visa for each entry. This placed him in the difficult position of having been a career British civil servant without having the rights of a British citizen, by definition a non-patrial without the right to enter or settle, a fact he never made public.

While race and perhaps ethnicity may not have contributed to Durrell’s exile from the center of empire, much like Vassanji’s descriptions of the displaced diaspora serving empire on its margins, Durrell served in the British Diplomatic Corps yet was alienated from the metropolitan center of empire. His first novel, *Pied Piper of Lovers*, recounts his childhood in India and his teenage return “home” to London; however, he chose to recast his protagonist in terms that brought him much closer to the doubly displaced diasporic Indians of Vassanji’s novels: Durrell’s protagonist, Walsh Clifton, is Anglo-Indian with an Indian/Burmese mother, and his childhood in India dominates the novel. This racial distinction marks Durrell’s intentions in a book that is otherwise autobiographical to such a degree that many scholars have failed to adequately distinguish between Walsh as a fictional character and Durrell himself. The heavily autobiographical element is also the most likely reason Durrell never allowed the novel to be republished (it had remained out of print since 1935). In this manner, race emphasizes Durrell’s sense of home and belonging to India.

This revision of himself as racially distinct from the British marks Durrell’s ambiguity with regard to his ancestral home, and he is adamant in interviews that his banishment from India by his father (for education) was a childhood trauma marking his loss of mother India for Father England (*Big Supposer* 24). Durrell repeats this trend in his ongoing (biologically unlikely) assertion of his Irishness. Furthermore, much like Vassanji’s Lalanis in *Dar es Salaam*, Durrell’s Walsh cannot rest in his first temporary home, London. He must eventually move on to escape the city and then, in a chapter of Durrell’s second novel *Panic Spring*, Walsh becomes an ‘expatriate’ in Greece, precisely as Durrell had done. Furthermore, just as Vassanji’s diasporic Indian community in Africa is made unwelcome in the place that had always been home, Durrell’s Walsh is made to confront his problematic position in his motherland, much as Durrell must have experienced his in-betweenness with regard to his nation of birth versus his nation of affiliation (though not his nationality). Like the Lalanis fleeing to Canada, Durrell also fled Greece for Egypt as the Nazis invaded, and both the Lalanis and Durrell’s Walsh are

unwelcome in the center of empire: London (Vassanji, *No New Land* 33).

This tension is made clear in the first image of England in *Pied Piper of Lovers*. Caryl Phillips describes, in an uncanny parallel, his vision of such a moment at sea when he writes of the immigration policies that restricted citizens of the Empire, constitutionally British, from entering or settling in Britain:

I have imagined the scene many times.... Crowds of West Indians are peering from the deck of a ship, eagerly securing their first view of the white cliffs of Dover.... At the moment of that first sighting I imagine that their dominant emotion would have been that of a profound sense of loss, for clearly they knew that it would be many years before they would return home to loved ones and familiar landscapes. ("A Dream" 106)

The poignancy for Phillips is that these "Crowds of West Indians" are British non-patrials under increasing limitations in the Commonwealth to enter or settle in Britain. To expand on the scope of his description, Phillips need only have skimmed further back in Durrell's *Pied Piper of Lovers*, a portion of which Phillips had anthologized in *Elegant Strangers* for Faber & Faber only one year prior to writing the scene above.

Durrell's vision in his autobiographical novel is equally as poignant as Phillips', and in a remarkably similar manner:

It would perhaps be impossible to define accurately the feeling of disappointment [Walsh] experienced as he stood on the deck of the liner and watched the pearly cliffs insinuate themselves out of the light sea-haze.... [I]t was *smaller* than he had imagined!... [T]his observation implied some sort of intuitive deduction.... [T]hose who shouted, pointed and exclaimed were in the minority. A great number stood silent, gripping the rail, and experiencing that emotion of country-love which is occasioned in exiles. (*Pied* 109, emphasis in original)

Walsh's inability to identify with the British citizens who revel over the "White as white" (*Pied* 110) cliffs—cliffs that recall his "less than white" skin—is enriched by his otherness from India. He turns to a "small and gentle-looking *ayah*... [whose] hands folded inside her sari" (111; emphasis in original) and feels "sick with an undefined regret, as though the beauty of the hills which he had left behind for ever still worked in him" (111). As Gordon Bowker points out, "the young colonial [was] returning 'home', but also setting off into exile" (18).

Despite a shared "home," the young *ayah* quickly marks him as foreign. He is doubly estranged from both homes, and in both cases for reasons of

ethnicity. Walsh asks her, "You are of the hills?" to which she responds, "Yes. Of Nepal" (Durrell, *Pied* 111). When he asserts his own home in the same manner—"He said shyly: 'I, too, am from the hills. Kurseong.'"—she becomes silent: "she seemed to regard him as yet another of the alien race with whom she had nothing in common save the coincidence of a common dwelling; a birth-place and a country for her, for him no more than a temporary house" (111).²

Contrary to the immediate expectations of "Britishness" from Durrell, just as Vassanji's book covers emphasize a diasporic identity before the reader begins the text itself, Durrell appears to biographically and autobiographically draw on the same tropes of alienation, displacement, and non-patrial exclusion described by Vassanji and Phillips. The effect for a broad reader is then to begin questioning Vassanji's view of Durrell's colonial privilege "from across" and its implicit binary opposition.

The Role of Allusion

Apart from these ties to India and shared displacements from "home," Vassanji and Durrell share a further tie through their texts. Malak notes Vassanji's

works are interlinked by cross references to episodes, events, and characters that appear in more than one work, as if suggesting that such is the impact of certain experiences and images residing in private and/or collective memory that they have the power to emerge and reemerge indefinitely. ("Ambivalent" 277)

Not only do Durrell and Vassanji share this technique of repeated characters, but this notion of memory is pervasive in Vassanji's works. *No New Land* fulfils its title by enlivening Toronto as the city of memory: the past cannot be escaped. Even as the characters abandon the world of Dar es Salaam, in Toronto the repressed memories re-emerge when least expected. Like Freud's use of the eternal city as a metaphor for the unconscious (18), Vassanji's Toronto is taken up from the immigrant's perspective, yet it yields "no new land." Wandering its streets, flâneur-like, the protagonist Nurdin only traverses the same streets of memory amidst the newness of the Canadian metropolis, such that "all earlier phases of development exist alongside the latter ones" (Freud 18). This apt tactic reflects the novel's triply-migrated title, created by an author doubly displaced from his community. *No New Land* derives from Durrell's translation of Cavafy's poem "The City." This is important since Durrell's translation is a poet's and revises Cavafy as an alternative anchor for Durrell's poetics contra T.S. Eliot, Durrell's poetry editor at Faber & Faber.

Nonetheless, in his lecture, Vassanji draws on Dalven's translation of Cavafy even though he uses Durrell's free translation as the source for *No New Land's* title. Vassanji's use of Cavafy was not purely for the sake of alluding to the Alexandrian Greek poet, who was doubly distanced in Arab Egypt as a homosexual and "foreigner." Durrell's translation emphasizes the sense of memory in Cavafy's poem—wandering through the "mental suburbs" recalls a past that confines the protagonist and prevents progress to a new land: "How long, how long must I be here / Confined among the dreary purlieus / Of the common mind?" (*Alexandria* 201). Importantly, this moment marks Durrell's departure from his English contemporaries, and Vassanji's allusion to it reveals the salient continuity between his works and Durrell's. Durrell mis-translated Cavafy's *μαρασμο* ("waste land" in the Oxford-Greek Dictionary) into the "dreary purlieus of the common mind" (emphasis mine). This instance marks a prominent trend in the novel as a whole—Durrell's "real" city (14) is not in line with Eliot's Unreal cities of "The Waste Land" (38-39), and repeated allusions emphasize this point. It is a place of displacement that cannot be escaped through further diaspora, and the protagonist need not escape a waste land since even simple suburbs prove inexorable. Moreover, this shift moves Durrell's "ambivalent affiliations" away from London, Eliot, and the High Modernists; instead, Durrell points toward the poet of exile, Cavafy, even if they all emphasize fragmentation. Cavafy becomes "the Old Poet of the city" in Durrell's Alexandria while the several allusions to Eliot continually distance Durrell from his senior poet and editor.

In a similar vein, Lacoue-Labarthe lifts Durrell's etymological pun on transplantation versus translation of Cavafy's poem for her article in *Revue de Littérature Comparée* (56).³ Using the transplantation of the foreigner as a doubly estranged position, she writes

Dire l'étranger dans le récit implique une transplantation, que l'on pense au repiquage ou à la greffe d'un végétal dans une terre étrangère, ou à un déplacement de personnes, voyage, déportation ou exil ("The foreigner in the narrative implies a transplantation. One thinks about the picking or transplantation of a vegetable into a foreign land, or to a displacement of persons, voyages, deportation, or exile"; 57).

This notion ties between Durrell and Vassanji and similarly "translated" and "transplanted" individuals. It also suggests that their famous towers are a continuous, yet translated, metaphor. The references to Cavafy, who is translated and planted into their works, link them and provokes the reader to construct an "etymology" for the shared image, an etymology that moves ever-closer to the "true word," proceeding backward from the "untrue" translation. This myth of purity or an edenic origin is part of the system both authors dispel, with the past haunting them as a presence of loss and guilt

rather than paradise. The reader's discomfort with the authenticity of the text thus begins with Vassanji's epigrammatic admission of *No New Land's* secondhand title, pointing the reader to Durrell's translation of Cavafy's "The City" in *Justine*, the first book of *The Alexandria Quartet*: "There is no new land, my friend, no / New sea; for the city will follow you" (*Alexandria* 201). But, this is hardly an origin, with Cavafy schematizing Durrell's expatriate population and disenfranchisement from place in Durrell's own translation.

This chain of allusions, the chains of memory, to which both authors refer, continues. Durrell's epigrams point the reader to manipulated translations of Freud's self-reflection versus Sade's *jouissance*, punning on the "happy" versus "sad" possibilities for reconciling "talk" and introspection with eros and crime in *Justine*. In the epigrams, the reader is caught between Freud's method of resurrecting the censored or the forgotten past (*Alexandria* 14) in a quotation from his letters to Fliess, which is juxtaposed against a quotation from the Marquis de Sade's *Justine*. For Sade, in contrast to Freud's aim to "discuss," there are only two options: "crime which renders us happy, or the noose, which prevents us from being unhappy" (14). This is the novel's ethical quandary—the characters move between self-reflection in exile versus unselfconscious libidinal desire. Durrell's narrator, in effect, moves from Sade's noose to Freud's talking cure, but the cost is remembrance and the impossibility of escape, though he finds the redemption of the past he seeks.⁴

This prominent problem in Durrell's work reframes his translation of Cavafy, from which Vassanji draws. One voice in "The City" seeks transplantation and the other warns of contamination by translation. Both, however, are caught in Durrell's colonization of the waste land, an empty space over which he constructions Cavafy's "City," and in which Cavafy's *μπαρτισο* operates *sous rature* (Derrida's term, drawn from Heidegger, that visually allows a word to indicate its own insufficiency by operating under ~~erasure~~ even while it is necessary to use an insufficient term), just as Nurdin's history is invisible, erased from his new life in Toronto. Yet, as Durrell argues, the text in a palimpsest is never fully erased. It informs the supertext just as the past infiltrates Nurdin's present. The cynosure of the tower, however, marks the attempts made in both novels to escape. As a cynosure, it both guides *and* attracts. Eliot's bridge for his allusions has fallen down, and we can only shore the disjointed fragments of Nerval's "*Le Prince d'Aquitaine à la tour abolie*" (41) beside the "black ruins" of Durrell's and Cavafy's Alexandrian lighthouse (*Alexandria* 201), all precariously near to Vassanji's leitmotif of the teetering "CN Tower blinking its mysterious signal" (*No New* 43, 59, 206). Unpacking this dense network of allusions binds Durrell and Vassanji ever closer.

In line with this continuous trope of the tower, Malak asserts,

The interplay of the past with the present evolves through the eye imagery: while the stern look of the father pierces

through the portrait in Nurdin's Toronto apartment, the CN Tower, "the concrete god who [doesn't] care" (176), "blinks unfailing in the distance" (59). Missionary not only redeems the past but also anticlimactically demystifies the dominant symbol of the new. ("Ambivalent" 280)

What has gone unnoticed in Vassanji's CN Tower, as the god who watches over the residents of 69 Rosecliffe Park, is its famous predecessor.⁵ The CN Tower blinks as a lighthouse, *preventing* approach rather than attracting it, as is first suggested in *No New Land*. It does not attract the seekers of new land in the way it guides commuters to work or as the Statue of Liberty's torch might beacon immigration—instead, it marks the city as a place of memory. Its recuperation, its return, is as an allusion to Durrell's city of memory with its great lighthouse, which itself exists in memory as an ancient wonder of the world. Alexandria is also literally the city of the great library, the memory of a civilization. As Vassanji notes in his lecture, and paraphrases Durrell's translation while doing so, "Your city may not have as illustrious a founder as Alexander, but it is your city, in its streets you'll wander about endlessly. I come from a city deeply engraved in my memory" ("The Boy" 3). For Vassanji, just like Durrell's narrator, writing becomes a process of remembering and recalling, of moving beyond Sade's blind pursuit of pleasure to Freud's recollection and discussion: "What, how do you write, then?.... you create a form that is itself a metaphor for the city, or for the process of remembering" (Vassanji, "The Boy" 5). Allusion, then becomes a key feature of this remembering and recuperating of a censored past, and this recuperation is the aim of both Vassanji's and Durrell's novels.

Implications

Durrell and Vassanji's ties refocus discussion of their positions in Anglo-Indian diasporic writing. In his lecture, Vassanji places Durrell as the outsider, as embodying the center of empire; yet, I hope that I have illustrated the difficulty of this characterization and the way it distances authors who are more proximate than they first appear.

Edward Said laid the groundwork for viewing Durrell as the voice of imperial power,⁶ versus the "view from across" that Vassanji uses for the colonized. The problems in Said's reading illustrate the difficulties for an author of uncertain origins and doubly displaced while still occupying the colonial's vestiges, or ornaments, of authority. Said describes Durrell's *Alexandria Quartet* as just such a social marker, an ornament:

The degree to which the cultural realm and its expertise are institutionally divorced from their real connections with power was wonderfully illustrated.... I was naively trying to

understand the kind of person who could order b-52 strikes over a distant Asian country... "You know," my friend said, "the Secretary is a complex human being; he doesn't fit the picture you may have formed of the cold-blooded imperialist murderer. The last time I was in his office I noticed Durrell's *Alexandria Quartet* on his desk." He paused meaningfully, as if to let Durrell's presence on that desk work its awful power alone.... What the anecdote illustrates is the approved separation of high-level bureaucrat from the reader of novels of questionable worth and definite status. ("Secular" 220-221)

To this anecdote⁷ Said adds the damning endnote:

The example of the Nazi who read Rilke and then wrote out genocidal orders to his concentration-camp underlings had not yet become well known. Perhaps then the Durrell-Secretary of Defense anecdote might not have seemed so useful to my enthusiastic friend. (462)

Apart from transforming Durrell into the American Secretary of Defense, this reading necessitates that Durrell (to be damned) must be sincere in this text and the reader must be naïve, such as Lionel Trilling's repetition of Durrell's errors with the Copts.⁸ Rather than separating the "bureaucrat from the reader of novels," Said's friend suggests that the two overlap: the official is *not* distinct from the novel reader, and the hesitations of one bleed into the other. What Said overlooks is that Rilke is hardly damned in his second anecdote, while damning Durrell is certainly the insinuation of his own. The reader's reputation harms the author, rather than the author's casting disrepute on his readership.

Marrouchi clarifies Said's intentions, recounting Said's only recorded sustained comments on Durrell, given during a year he spent in Beirut learning Arabic:

One evening at Beirut College for Women, [Said] addressed a large assembly on a prize work of the Orientalist canon, Lawrence Durrell's *Alexandria Quartet*. Many of the Westerners in the room imagined themselves Durrellian heroes in a latter-day Alexandria of intrigue and romance. Said attacked the novel's triviality, its incomprehensible metaphors, its meaningless plot.... [O]ne university lecturer protested that Durrell's images were compelling. 'Compelling?' Said asked. 'When he needs an image for human communication, he reaches for the [64] telephone'. (Marrouchi 63-64)⁹

This presents several problems that typify postcolonial readings of Durrell. The "incomprehensible metaphors" are dismissed precisely because they are too comprehensible. The political purpose for Said's critique remains laudable, yet Durrell's readers are hard-pressed to view his Western characters

as heroes. The Westerners' imagination of themselves as Durrell's characters (pederasts, homosexuals, poverty-stricken and sexually humiliated tutors, incestuous authors, or politicians blind to machinations undermining Britain) seems highly unlikely in the cultural climate of 1972. The only reader I know to have voiced this feeling of wonder for the heavily Orientalist Alexandria refers instead to the film version of Durrell's *Quartet* (Cuckor's 1969 *Justine*), which has received nearly universally terrible reviews, and this reader is neither Western nor an Orientalist: M.G. Vassanji ("The Boy" 1-3). The enviable heroes of the film appear quite dapper in stark contrast to the novel, which makes the 1969 film Said's most likely source for his 1972 comments, rather than the 1957-60 novels themselves.

Even more difficult is Durrell's Philhellenism, which casts his Alexandria through the rose-coloured glass of a Homeric rosy-fingered dawn—this vision is Greek in origin and would never be fully Arab. Hence, it runs contrary to Arab or Muslim forms of Egyptian nationalism or pan-Arabism. It is now common for Greek-oriented descriptions of Alexandria's history or its Greek minority to be labeled "Orientalist" and "Imperial," which ignores the culturally diverse nature of the city prior to the 1960s when nationalist pressures exerted a more Egyptian, that is, Muslim and Arab, vision of the city and populace.

Said himself perpetuates this presentation of Philhellenism as anti-Arab, and hence disregards the long Greek history in Egypt. Oddly, he uses Hellenic Studies as a way of excusing scholars from his critique in *Orientalism*. Hellenism receives scarce comment in *Orientalism* and appears primarily as a title of rescue—to be a Hellenist is acceptable despite the politics of representation and the infantilization of the modern against the idealized ancient. Admittedly, postcolonial Greece is also far different from postcolonial Egypt. Yet, insofar as *Orientalism* "has less to do with the Orient than it does with 'our' world" (Said, *Orientalism* 12), Hellenism is a construct used to gain knowledge, and thereby power, over the Greek world, since "to have... knowledge of such a thing is to dominate it, to have authority over it" (32). Said's argument stands, but his limitation of the argument falls, just like the Alexandrian lighthouse.

Vassanji parallels this problem by describing his own experiences in his "view from across." As a boy, he saw the figures of empire, such as his image of Durrell, from across the street, from the "wrong" side. Later in life, he crossed this street:

Who could have imagined that the boy who stood observing the Mountolive-like figure in helmet and frills inspecting the guard of honour would one day accompany another Queen's representative as a cultural delegate. Much to my disappointment, I found [the Mountolive-like figures] tediously ordinary and bureaucratic, without a shred of

romance in them. But the fact remains, this experience was an example of how compartments had opened up into each other, how the divides of yesteryear—racial, cultural, political—had simply become dotted lines. (Vassanji, “The Boy” 8)

The same tactic appears in *No New Land*, where Krishna, Aphrodite, or Lakshmi all blur in 69 Rosecliffe Park (71), all echoing Durrell’s “Five races, five languages, a dozen creeds” that are “resumed in the word Alexandria” (Durrell, *Alexandria* 17), Rosecliffe Park is “[w]here a dozen races mingle, conversant in at least as many tongues” (Vassanji, *No New Land* 60). The “shred of romance” in Vassanji (8), however, points to the imaginative origins of his vision, which match the colonial exoticism dreamed of by those whom he beholds. Vassanji’s misreading of Durrell becomes eerily like Durrell’s climax of misunderstanding in *The Alexandria Quartet* in which David Mountolive and Leila Hosnani gaze at each other across divides that are *not* dotted lines and wherein the mutual misunderstanding Vassanji discusses cannot be dismissed.

In Durrell’s vision, for Mountolive (a diplomat trained to regard the Orient through the apparatus of his books and formal Arabic) the Orient explicitly comes alive via his unconscious desires. Egypt is

seen from the vantage point of someone inside the canvas his own imagination had painted, [and it is here Mountolive] had suddenly found the exotic becoming completely normal. Its poetry was irradiated by the unconscious with which it was lived. (Durrell, *Alexandria* 410)

Mountolive’s Orientalist construct of Egypt and of his lover Leila Hosnani becomes overt—his brutal, sensual and thrilling Orient is immediately juxtaposed to Leila’s Occidental construction of a sexualized and conquering Occidental Other. This creates a solid line between any meaningful meeting of the lovers, whose imaginative visions cannot reconcile with the realities of their love object. When asked why she loves him, Leila can only respond by quoting her favourite English author, which Zahlan (227) recognizes as Ruskin’s “Imperial Duty”:

‘There is a destiny now possible to us—the highest ever set before a nation to be accepted or refused. We are still undegenerate in race; a race mingled of the best northern blood....’ Mountolive listened to her voice with astonishment, pity and shame. It was clear that what she saw in him was something like a prototype of a nation which existed now only in her imagination. She was kissing and cherishing a painted image of England. It was for him the oddest experience in the world.... (Durrell, *Alexandria* 411)

Only in this invasion of his own identity does Mountolive confront the nature of representation and how schemas dominate the experiences of other characters throughout the *Quartet*. In his paroxysm over Leila's misprision, David finally speaks:

'Stop. Stop,' he cried sharply. 'We are not like that any longer, Leila.' It was an absurd book-fed dream this Copt had discovered and translated. He felt as if all those magical embraces had been somehow won under false pretences—as if her absurd thoughts were reducing the whole thing, diminishing the scale of it to something as shadowy and unreal as, say, a transaction with a woman of the streets. Can you fall in love with the stone effigy of a dead crusader? (*Alexandria* 412)

Through Leila's Occidentalism, Mountolive becomes aware of the psychological construction of false visions of other nationalities. Nonetheless, he does not realize the influence of his own Orientalist imagination. Just as she fell in love with him because "[he is] English," he fell in love with her because she is "Egyptian." Likewise, Vassanji's view from across fails to realize he and Durrell are both on the outside of imperial belonging.

Durrell, like Vassanji, reveals "ambivalent affiliations" otherwise shadowed by the false images of the Orientalist and Occidentalism imagination, and such false images still demarcate authors for fields of academic study. I suggest the potentially invisible others of Indian diasporic literature be read in tandem with their peers. While he is an unlikely candidate for Indian Anglophone literature, especially in contrast to Vassanji's milieu of authors of visible Indian origins, even if hidden by more remote extraction, the usefulness of Durrell to this group and to Vassanji in particular is difficult to overlook. Vassanji's Nurdin is only able to end his journey in Toronto, but this is not a discovery of new land—as he puts it, "Canada to him was a veritable Amarapur, the eternal city, the land of the west in quest of which his community had embarked some four hundred years ago. This was the final stop. He was very happy" (*No New* 198). This moment of realization comes from gazing at the blinking lighthouse, itself alluding back to Cavafy's city, which "will follow you" (Durrell, *Alexandria* 201). But, like Durrell's Darley, who eventually returns and then departs, Nurdin's rest comes not from finding an escape from himself in a new place but from exploring the past through memory and exorcising its repressions. Vassanji's view of Durrell now seems less a view from across than a view from beside, but with shifting boundaries and ambivalent affiliations, the line of sight is only clear when awry.

Notes

1. It is worthwhile to emphasize Durrell's residencies in a number of politically tense locations. Though forced to these locales by invaders or financial need, his biography charts a series of ties to locations and moments of colonial decline and in the midst of fierce political unrest.
2. For a broader discussion of this scene and Durrell's ties to the Indian community of writers in London in the 1930s, see Gifford "Introduction" (xi-xiv).
3. This article's title also derives from *The Alexandria Quartet*.
4. The most thorough examination of this conflict between Durrell's epigrams is given by Skodili (228-32).
5. Kanaganayakam allusively reads the CN Tower in relation to *The Great Gatsby* after noting the "sense of futility" in Vassanji's epigraph from Cavafy (201), though she does not mention that Cavafy is acquired through Durrell. This allusion to Fitzgerald is also echoed by Malak (*Difference* 54). This is double significant since Fitzgerald's Valley of Ashes in *The Great Gatsby* is itself yet another allusion to Eliot's *The Waste Land*.
6. For further discussion of Said's work in relation to Durrell, see Gifford's "Lawrence Durrell's *Alexandria Quartet* and Colonial Knowing: Implicating Friedrich Nietzsche and Edward Said" (95-112). Diboll's *Lawrence Durrell's Alexandria Quartet In Its Egyptian Contexts* is largely based on Said's perspective as well. Also, Diboll's "The Secret History of Lawrence Durrell's *The Alexandria Quartet*: The Mountolive-Hosnani Affair, Britain, and the Wafd" (79-105) elucidates the veracity of the Coptic ties to Palestine, which postcolonial critics have otherwise dismissed as "ridiculous" (Manzalaoui 148). Michael Haag (10) has recently clarified this point further, tying Durrell to Zionist arms suppliers, a scenario in which his third wife's father played a role remarkably similar to the Coptic smugglers in *The Alexandria Quartet*. Also see Kaczvinsky's "Memlik's House and Mountolive's Uniform" (93-118).
7. This is remarkably similar to Eagleton's sighting of *The Alexandria Quartet* on his friend Greenway's mantle, "no doubt to demonstrate his entirely non-existent openness to the new" (*Gatekeeper* 170).
8. Hamouda, who praises Durrell's awareness of the political conflicts in Egypt (100), points to Durrell's use of erroneous facts in

S.H. Leeder's *Modern Sons of the Pharaohs: A Study of the Manners and Customs of the Copts of Egypt* for his description of [Narouz's] funeral.... The readiness with which the West accepts Durrell's descriptions is exemplified by Lionel Trilling's comment that 'ancient ways and the ancient peoples are before our eyes... for

example, the days long mourning of Narouz Hosnani'.
(108; quoting Trilling 61)

9. The referenced work is not in the book's bibliography. It is Said's notes for the speech, unpublished among his private papers.

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